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ABSTRACT

The interview process in qualitative research is discussed, based on the experiences of the two participants in a series of life-story interviews. The interviews were held during a pilot study for a doctoral project, and this account of the process is presented from the dual perspectives of the researcher-interviewer and of the interviewee, respectively. Both participants were female educational administrators. In the course of the pilot study, the participants met for a series of seven interviews, each lasting approximately 1 hour. The first six interviews occurred over a 3-week period. A key element of the interview process involved the charting of decision points in the life history. A decision flowchart was developed depicting the sequence of activities and choices that the interviewee had related. The chart was present at each session. The seventh interview occurred 2 months after the sixth interview. During the intervening period, the researcher analyzed the tapes and drafted a 4,000-word biography. This final validation interview was also a time for the two participants to discuss more fully their experiences as participants in the pilot study. Embedded in these reflections are technical and ethical issues related to life-story interviewing. Selected aspects of experiences in six initial interviews, supplemented by tapes, field notes, journal entries, a biography, and recollections, are the focus of the inquiry. (TJH)

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INTERVIEWING:

TWO SIDES OF THE STORY

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Prologue

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the discussion and understanding of the interview process in qualitative research. Specifically, we present--in two voices--the experiences of the participants in a series of life-story (Bertaux, 1981, p. 7) interviews. The two voices are those of the researcher-interviewer and of the interviewee. The experiences we relate occurred during the pilot study for a doctoral project that documents the life stories, personal and professional, of four women who have completed doctorates in educational administration and who are educational administrators.

In the course of the pilot study, we met for a series of seven interviews, each about one hour long. The first six interviews occurred over a three-week period. Between interviews, the researcher reviewed the tape of the previous interview. From the review, she developed a decision-flow chart depicting the sequence of activities and choices that the interviewee had related. She brought the chart to each session. The seventh interview occurred two months after the sixth one. During the intervening period, the researcher analyzed the tapes and drafted a 4000-word biography, "telling back" the interviewee's life story. The researcher gave the biography to the interviewee, who read it. The seventh interview provided the interviewee with the opportunity to correct, clarify, and elaborate on the written biography. This final validation interview was also a time for the two of us to discuss more fully our experiences as participants in the pilot study.

In this paper, we focus on selected aspects of our experiences in the first six interviews, when Claudette (the interviewee) was telling her story. At that time, because we were examining our process as we went along, we began to articulate and explore a number of issues that emerged. Now, we have drawn on the pilot study tapes, the field notes and journal entries, the biography, and our own

memories to continue the examination that we started some time ago. What follows is but a brief first reading of our involvement in the process of life-story interviewing. Our paper is personal in presentation: we offer here a reconstruction of and reflections on our own experiences.

We approached the writing of the paper through a combination of independent and collaborative analysis and reflection. Each of us reviewed the tapes and wrote our own narrative account of the experience, from the individual's perspective. Then, we read and discussed one another's accounts. Although each of us then revised our own account, we retained the differences in emphasis and in sequence of topics. Finally, each of us drafted our own reflections on the experience, and then we combined them as an epilogue. And, incidentally, writing this paper has brought us back to talking into a tape recorder. We have tape recorded our own discussions about the reconstruction of the pilot study experiences and used the tapes as another source for writing this paper.

In the paper we trace, each in our own voice, our approach to and engagement in the project. Embedded in these reflections are technical and ethical issues (Faraday & Plummer, 1979) related to life-story interviewing. We recognize the affective as well as the cognitive dimensions of our experiences. We document the caution, the ambivalence, the enthusiasm. We recall and examine concerns about approaching the encounter, about building and nurturing trust (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 256-257), about power relations (Glennon, 1983; May, 1987; Weber, 1985), about reciprocity (Oakley, 1981), and about collaboration (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, pp. 102-110; Glennon, 1983, pp. 268-269). Through this presentation of two perspectives, we demonstrate some of the differences in what matters, and when it matters, depending on which is your side of the research story.

Increased attention is being given in the literature to the activity of doing research, especially qualitative research. Keeping records of one's experiences as a

qualitative researcher is a widely accepted tradition in the social sciences. Publishing those experiences has seldom been done. However, personal accounts are becoming a popular complement to conventional treatments of research and design matters. Bertaux (1981, p. 44), for example, calls on life-story researchers to tell their own stories as well as those of the people they study. Our paper is one attempt to do that. By presenting two sides of the research experience, however, we believe that some relevant affective, technical, and ethical aspects of the life-story interviewing process become more clear.

According to Bertaux and Kohli, the "life story" is an "oral, autobiographical narrative [of the entire life span or specified aspects of a life] generated through interaction" (1984, p. 217). They say that the "narrative interview" process is characterized by the relatively uninterrupted relation of a life story, followed by questions that are worded to elicit "more narrative detail" rather than opinions and speculations (1984, p. 224). The point is to obtain "as full a subjective view" as possible (Plummer, 1983, p. 14)--all the while acknowledging that the story is never complete (Bertaux, 1981, p. 778), nor the totality captured (Faraday & Plummer, 1979, p. 778).

Referring to Bertaux's definition, the three significant characteristics of the life story are that it is narrative, autobiographical, and generated through oral interaction. Hankiss suggests that the autobiographical narrative amounts to the creation of a personal ontology, the building of a theory about oneself (1981, p. 203). This building process, or reconstruction will emphasize some events more than others, thus achieving a particular dramatic impact (Gergen & Gergen, 1984, p. 182). Since the telling of such a story is "a risky business" (Grumet, 1987, p. 321), it is not surprising that any given account is selective. Grumet expresses it this way: "Every telling is a partial prevarication. . . . Our stories are the masks through which we can be seen, and with every telling we stop the flood and swirl of thought so

someone can get a glimpse of us, and maybe catch us if they can" (1987, p. 322). She suggests that, as we give meaning to our experience by reflecting on it, we are forming and reforming ourselves (1987, p. 322).

But in life-story interviewing the reflection is not a solitary process. Eliciting the autobiographical narrative by means of interviews both enhances and complicates the research processes and the research product. As Becker points out, the life story researcher is guided by an interest in the "person's 'own story' but has certain sociological [or psychological] questions in mind as well" (1970, p. 420). Therefore, the researcher will bring his/her own focus and sense of breadth to the account and the interpretation of it. At a minimum, the researcher gives direction to a collaborative exploration, simply by formulating questions (Grumet, 1987, p. 324).

Catani elaborates the concept of the joint creation. He describes the life story as "the product of an encounter . . . the result of two-way seduction, a love story" (1981, p. 212). That description acknowledges the affective as well as the cognitive dimension of this interactive research process. It points to the joint creation of a narrative, the drawing of one person into the life of another.

The Interviewee Speaks: Claudette's Story

For the fifth time in the last fifteen minutes, the phone was ringing again. Apologetically, I said to the student sitting facing me, "That darn phone, it never stops!" Juggling the file in my hand, a pencil in my mouth, I reached for the phone while continuing to make notations.

--Good afternoon.

--Good afternoon, may I speak to Claudette Tardif?

--This is she. May I help you?

--Yes. My name is Beth Young, a doctoral student in the educational administration program at the University of Alberta. I'm interested in doing a thesis on women in administration looking at the decisions and choices which they have made in their careers. Your name was suggested to me as a possible candidate for a pilot study. I know of your interest in qualitative research and as a matter of fact I have read your dissertation on teacher education. I would like to spend three to four hours of interview time with you so as to hone my interview skills and better familiarize myself with the process of life-story interviewing. Would you agree to meet with me and be interviewed regarding the choices and decisions relating to the development of your career?

Such was my introduction to Beth and to the experience of life-story interviewing. My immediate reactions were mixed. On the one hand, I was flattered that someone had thought that I could be a suitable subject for this type of study. On the other hand, I was thinking that this was yet something else added on to an already too busy schedule. It was difficult to refuse, however, knowing that only a few years previously, I had been a doctoral student, often dependent on the good will of others to help me out. Besides, Beth sounded pleasant enough, someone that would be easy to speak to. I agreed and a convenient time for both of us to meet was set up for the following week. Beth was to come to my office.

A few minutes before Beth's arrival the following week, I started to feel apprehensive about the upcoming interview. I actually knew very little about the nature of the proposed research project. I remember thinking that I had asked very few questions and that only a very general description had been given by Beth. As usual, the day had been hectic. I really didn't feel like my thoughts were organized in any coherent fashion, especially not ready to be shared with a stranger. I was wondering what type of questions I would be asked. I was conscious of not wanting to disappoint someone who obviously knew something about me and who had

chosen me for her pilot study. Yet, I couldn't help feeling that my story was not particularly interesting.

As I opened the door to my office to let out my last appointment, I noticed that someone was waiting for me in the hallway. It must be Beth. I was late. Oh well, the first interview probably would not take more than an hour. And after all, I could terminate at any time.

Once the general introductions were completed, I helped Beth set up the tape recorder. I suggested that I sit beside Beth rather than across the desk from her and that we place the tape recorder on the desk facing us. I was concerned that the sound be clear and loud. I remembered only too well some of the problems that I had encountered with tape recorders when doing my doctoral research.

My first encounter with Beth proved to be most pleasant. Beth began by asking me what had made me decide to become a teacher. I found it easy to discuss the factors which had led me to choose teaching as a career. In fact, we managed to laugh a great deal. I could honestly say that I enjoyed the first session. I felt at ease, not at all threatened. I enjoyed the opportunity to talk about some of my life experiences. The hour was almost been like a therapy session. As I told Beth, it is not often that one has a platform from which to talk about oneself, with someone willing to listen. It was obvious that one session was not going to suffice. I was looking forward to the next session. I had barely begun to tell my story.

Our initial encounter was crucial in setting the stage for any subsequent interviews. I felt committed to helping a fellow researcher for one or two sessions. But as I told Beth later, I knew that "When you came in, I was really going to be judging--one session, two sessions. There was a comfortableness, you listened well. I felt a genuine interest on your part."

From the very first interview, I felt at ease with Beth. Her willingness to accommodate herself to my schedule and her concern to respect my time constraints

impressed me. Although she never disclosed very much about herself, a sense of rapport was easily established. This may in part have been due to the similarities in our age, gender, profession (teaching) and socio-historical background (both from the same region, both having completed similar courses in a doctoral program). Beth could identify with many of the elements that constituted part of my life story. I felt that her perception and evaluation of the situations that I was referring to was accurate and that she could relate to my interpretation of a given situation.

There was a comfortableness in the interviews. Beth was always present to me as a person. Because her questions arose from my story, I genuinely felt her interest. She was most receptive and attentive, at times prompting for more detail but always letting me lead the way. In this way, she conveyed a sense of importance to the telling of my story. It was obvious that she was a good listener--often paraphrasing my comments, providing a summary statement or asking a pertinent question. In later interviews, she would often preface her comments with the statement, "In listening to yesterday's tape, . . ." This reassured me of Beth's seriousness as a researcher as well as confirmed the importance of what I was saying. It became the basis for a trusting relationship.

The trust was reinforced at the beginning of the second session, when Beth commented on an article I had given her. The article, one that I particularly liked, was a phenomenological treatment of interviewing. To my surprise, Beth had found the time to read the article between our first and second sessions. She spoke of it right away. Once again, she had established her credibility and her desire to accept what I was offering. There was a common ground from which we could exchange views on research. The bonding process was well under way.

The enthusiasm that had been generated in our first encounter continued in subsequent interviews. The same anticipation was always present--the desire to continue telling my story. I was continually surprised by how much of myself I was

willing to share with a "stranger." I found it easier to discuss my thoughts and feelings regarding some of my professional decisions with Beth than I did with many of my colleagues. There was a freedom of expression afforded to me in these sessions that was not present in my everyday contacts. Beth was not a threat to me in any professional sense--she did not have a stake in any of the issues that had been discussed.

On the personal level, I found it much more difficult to share. Although the interviews were to deal with choices and decision points in my professional life, it soon became evident that the personal and the professional were closely intermingled. In the telling of my story, I would find myself drawing on anecdotes or relating bits of information from my personal life which would help explain or clarify the choices or decisions which I had made in my professional life. It was at these points that I felt uneasy. I felt cautious and ambivalent--should I disclose that bit of information; what will she think; will this be kept confidential; and, most of all, can this information be used against me? I was very willing to render a truthful account of my life story. On the other hand, I was not quite willing to strip all the layers.

A key element of the interview process was the charting of decision points in my life history. At the beginning of each interview, Beth would present me with a timeline of decision points that she had been able to identify from listening to my story. I must confess that I felt strange, seeing my life neatly laid out in a chronological order. I felt that the many threads of my story were woven from different perspectives and were not fully represented on the timeline. The chart, though accurate, did not flesh out the sentiments or feelings associated with each decision point. I felt that "Claudette" had been lost from the picture. It was, however, an interesting way to begin each session. I was able to expand on or clarify

any of the information that had been previously given. In that sense, it reestablished the encounter, the relationship.

Although I was continually conscious of the purpose of the interviews (as part of a research project), I became attached to the telling of my life story. Between interviews, I would find myself thinking, "I forgot to tell Beth this, I must remember to explain that particular event. I should tell her this so that she can get it in proper chronological order, so that she can understand better." The telling of the story had become important to me. As a researcher I knew that the details in my life story were probably not particularly significant within the larger scope of Beth's project. I was quite aware that as a researcher she had her own agenda and that she was free to select whatever portion she chose to draw on of my life story. I felt, however, a sense of proprietorship over this story.

With each passing interview, I worried more about what Beth's commitment was towards me. It wasn't so much what she was writing about me that troubled me but what she knew. What would she decide to include or leave out in my biography? On what grounds would she be making those decisions? What would she do with the information after our sessions? How did I cope with the knowledge that someone whom I might never see again had all of this information about me? I wondered what I had gotten myself into. By handing information over to Beth, I had placed myself in a vulnerable position. This was definitely something that I had not planned on when I agreed to collaborate in this research project.

The Interviewer Speaks: Beth's Story

There I was, sitting in my advisor's office enthusiastically listing the many issues that I must resolve before I could begin the pilot study for my doctoral research. It was now three months since a supervisory committee had passed my candidacy proposal. My advisor, Al, looked at me with a carefully blank expression

and said, "Why not just pick some names, phone those people up, and ask to interview them?" The abyss, indeed.

Well, why not do as Al suggested? For one thing, I wasn't certain yet of the demographic and personal characteristics I was seeking in my interviewees. For another, I didn't really know what I would ask them to do. I mean, "Tell me the story of your career-related experiences." What kind of an interview question was that? Besides, I hate talking on the telephone, especially to strangers.

I succeeded in delaying any drastic action for another three weeks. I did, however, identify a promising interviewee for a pilot study. Her name was Claudette Tardif. She was a recent doctoral graduate from the University of Alberta's Department of Educational Administration, where I was a student. She had done a highly regarded qualitative study, with Al as her supervisor. She was now a professor-administrator affiliated with a French-speaking university faculty in western Canada. That made her immediately identifiable. I would not be able to involve her as one of my official interviewees, so why not try to involve her this way?

Eventually, I mustered the courage to telephone Claudette. She wasn't in her office. I had a carefully prepared opening statement and no opportunity to use it! I telephoned her several times that day, without reaching her. To keep myself busy between attempts, I started reading her dissertation. I enjoyed the dissertation and felt better acquainted with Claudette already. I especially appreciated some comments that she made about the difficulties of doing qualitative research.

I telephoned Claudette again the next day, and reached her. I asked if she would agree to be my pilot interviewee. I explained that her story would not be included for analysis in my thesis. And, I asked her if she would give me some feedback about the process, and my technique. As I noted in my journal, Claudette was "great! Receptive, pleasant, wiling to get started. She said that she wouldn't

have enough to say to fill three hours." However, we did make a tentative series of three one-hour appointments for the following week. We would meet at her office.

Having made those appointments, I was nervous. I occupied myself with technical preparations. More than anything else, I worried and made lists. Things to buy, to take with me to the interview. Things to do before the interview. Things to remember to do/say at the beginning of the interview, the end of the interview. What to wear for the interview. Plans about what to do between the interviews. Indeed, my journal and field notes are filled with (frequently unexecuted) lists and plans, an habitual worrier's mementoes of many battles with anxiety and ambiguity.

I was anxious but also excited about the pilot study. First, there was the unfamiliar prospect of conducting unstructured life-story interviews. Not only would I be dealing with a stranger, but I would be seeking a detailed account of that stranger's activities, her daily life over many years. The questions I asked would be derived from Claudette's own story, not superimposed on it. Moreover, I would be interviewing a woman who was herself an experienced researcher. I was 37 years old and an established professional who had done conventional interviewing, but I was pretty much a greenhorn where scholarly research was concerned. This new challenge appealed to me, but could I carry it off?

I arrived early for the first interview. My punctuality indicated how cautious I was being: usually, I run late. But I wanted to make a good first impression. I wanted to show that I was eager to begin, that I knew Claudette's time was valuable, that I was organized. Claudette was late. I stood in the hallway and waited, feeling very aware that I had only a minor part in Claudette's busy life.

When Claudette arrived, she demonstrated a skilful willingness to put me at ease, just as I was intent on putting her at ease. Claudette questioned me in a friendly but professional way about my proposed project. She was alert and considerate in technical/mechanical matters, offering ready assistance with my

recording equipment and, later, even pausing when she thought the tape was running out. Sitting there, I felt conscious that each of us was discreetly observing our own and each other's non-verbal behavior, while we did our preliminary chatting.

I found all of this interested consideration rather disconcerting, for several reasons. It reinforced my sense that Claudette was a more experienced researcher than I was. It seemed to me that Claudette expected me to be technically competent, and I wanted to meet her expectations. Although she seemed genuinely helpful, her sophistication left me wondering who, if anyone, was in control here. Finally, her behavior demonstrated her awareness that we were engaged in "research." I realized, for example, that there would be no such thing as forgetting the presence of the tape recorder. So much for being the unobtrusive researcher!

Those early impressions had an immediate impact on my behavior. I wasn't keen on the image of the detached, mysterious investigator, anyway. But I was ambivalent about what was appropriate, since I didn't want to "bias" Claudette's story. I opted for a cautiously open approach. I started by disclosing some of my uncertainties regarding the project and some of the concepts that interested me. Once Claudette had begun her story, I also began making a few disclosures about myself by intentionally linking aspects of my background to hers. Claudette responded to my openness with stories about her own research and life, so I was rewarded immediately and continually with better material and with a growing sense of collaboration.

Even so, I worried about being an obtrusive interviewer. I decided to be cautiously quiet. Reasonably enough, though, Claudette did want me to provide her with some sense of purpose and reassurance that her contributions were worthy. Sometimes there was a need to clarify, or to give Claudette signals about the kinds of things that interested me. I attempted a paraphrase, and later a summary

statement. Each time, Claudette responded enthusiastically. As my remarks generated that reaction on Claudette's part, the enthusiasm infected me and I felt tempted to speak more, to engage in a dialogue.

Between the first and second sessions, I began drafting a decision-flow chart. I was openly ambivalent about the document that I produced. The chart was merely a crude chronological sketch of the major decisions in a life. The chart was useful to me, though. In order to draft it, I had to listen carefully to the tape after each session. As I reviewed, I assessed my interviewing technique as well as rehearsing Claudette's story-to-date. Drafting the chart helped me to see the gaps/conflicts in the story or in my understanding of it. And, referring to it when I was with Claudette helped us get started or re-focused in a session. I was surprised to learn that Claudette was ambivalent about the chart, but for very different reasons.

During the second session, Claudette began to fill in some of the gaps in the chart by revealing aspects of her personal life as they related to her professional life. She talked very softly and commented that I was asking hard questions. I probed, because I was worried about selective recall, censorship, and about what I termed "speculative reconstruction" (the "I suppose" responses). I sensed an ambivalence (natural enough) on her part about discussing personal matters. Listening to her speak, I felt downright nosey. Yet, I had stated my belief that the personal and the professional were interwoven. I could not give Claudette absolute leeway to decide what was and what was not relevant. I didn't know myself. I persisted only because some of those personal questions did trigger new lines of recollection for Claudette, illuminating the context in which Claudette was living out her paid-work career.

Aware that Claudette was risking more and more, I responded by opening the third session with some carefully casual remarks about my own habits. It was an interviewing tactic to enhance the empathy and rapport between us. But it was also becoming an ethical issue. It seemed to me that a degree of reciprocity was

required in our relations. Nonetheless, from a technical perspective, I was ambivalent about making such comments. Would my apparently harmless remarks somehow inhibit rather than encourage Claudette's narrative? And, always, there was the issue of time.

My initial sense of the significance of time never diminished. We sat where a large (or so it seemed to me) clock was clearly visible. I took care not to break our implicit "contract." That is, I never attempted to push an interview beyond the agreed length. By the end of the second session, however, I knew that we would need more than the three sessions we had scheduled. But I was ambivalent about extending the pilot. Asking for more sessions seemed like a breach of my initial contract with a busy woman. And, more sessions meant more work for me. This wasn't even my "real study" yet! Somewhat reluctantly, I did request three additional sessions and Claudette agreed quite willingly. We carried on.

After only one session, I knew that I liked Claudette. Why? Of course, I liked her because of her willingness to engage with me in this life-story project. Not only had she been willing at the outset to give the project a try, but she stayed with me through longer and more demanding explorations than I had ever anticipated. And, although I was aware that our lives and our backgrounds were different in many ways, there was common territory. Ambivalent as I was about conventional careers and success, it was a relief to find that I could sincerely appreciate Claudette and her accomplishments. As well, my enjoyment of Claudette was reinforced from time to time when she expressed an opinion that I shared. At first, I took silent pleasure in the ways that Claudette's experiences and viewpoints intersected with mine. Later on, I began to make those intersections known to Claudette.

What I didn't do in the first session, or very often in the subsequent two or three sessions, was to indicate differences in our background or opinions. For example, I am concerned about sexist language. Claudette used the generic "he." I

chose not to comment on the usage, although I noticed it immediately. By contrast, in our sixth session, Claudette remarked that she had been brought up to wear skirts, not pants. She added that she still didn't wear pants very often. I interjected, quite spontaneously, "Oh, life without blue jeans, I can't imagine!" By then, I felt free to acknowledge the differences between us, because I felt more secure about our common ground.

Claudette told her story vividly and well, learning quickly to incorporate the detail and the anecdotes that I sought. Claudette's account was also frank and amusing, often at her own expense. At times we slipped quite naturally into repartee, stopping the narrative with our laughter. Indeed, there were times when I believed that Claudette's story-telling abilities were contributing far more to the quality of our sessions than my interviewing skills. That didn't threaten me because this venture was so obviously a collaborative one. At times, I was just grateful that Claudette wasn't altogether reliant on me.

I was exhilarated by the style of research I had undertaken. I did worry about the ambiguities of my role as interviewer, of course. My worries were related mainly to the amount of structure I should impose on our sessions, and on the whole process. I seemed to swing from being an interrogator to being a far-too-passive listener. Nonetheless, some sessions or parts of sessions went so well that they restored my flagging confidence. I never lost the thrill of going into a session with nothing to draw on but myself, my knowledge, my skills, my sense of humour, my deep interest in Claudette and her story.

Along with my growing enthusiasm about Claudette, her story, and our project came new feelings of caution and ambivalence. Even liking Claudette seemed problematical--would I be willing to probe and to interpret with any rigor? Then there was the problem of trust. The more Claudette told me, the more I felt that she trusted me. And the more responsibility I felt towards her. Sometimes I

wished that she would tell me less, trust me less, so that my obligations to her would be fewer. The trust was fragile, and I did everything I could to nurture it and to deserve it. But sometimes I thought how much easier it would be for me, and doubtless for her also, if Claudette had remained more guarded and we had stopped at three sessions. I found that I didn't really want to live with all of the knowledge that I had about Claudette's life. Carrying around so much trust and private information was exhausting.

As Claudette shared more and more of her life with me, I felt more and more concerned about sharing the power in our relationship. While Claudette had the power not to make disclosures, once they were made, the power shifted to me. Talking a bit about myself was one way that I attempted to even out our relations. Inviting Claudette to discuss our interviewing process, and the chart, was another attempt. Encouraging Claudette to tell her own story as she chose ceased to be a technical point and became a desire on my part that Claudette should remain in control of her own story.

The riskiest thing of sharing power was by "telling back" to Claudette what she had told me. It was risky because it might scare Claudette off. She might withdraw when she realized how much I knew, or be angry if my telling back seemed inadequate to her. The telling back of Claudette's story was a technical matter of validation, tricky enough at any level. It was a question of accuracy, which I owed Claudette for the time and the effort she had committed to the interviews. But there was much more at stake. Our relationship, our mutual trust, required that I be honest and sensitive in my oral summaries, in the chart, and ultimately in the biography that I wrote about Claudette. Only as I gave back to Claudette what she had given to me--as I understood it--would I be sharing the power I had accumulated. How much of that power would I, could I share?

Epilogue

Ours is a story of shifting perspectives. Each of us experienced variations on the themes of caution, ambivalence, and enthusiasm. These variations occurred, not in linear or cyclical patterns, but in changing configurations. As our enthusiasm led to greater engagement, that very engagement gave rise to new doubts and worries. However, the individual configurations of our responses, like our viewpoints, were never identical. It is by working together on this paper that each of us has achieved a clearer understanding of the range of perspectives and emotions that the other experienced.

Ours is also a story of disclosure, and of the attendant self-discovery. Each of us was transformed in the process of developing a narrative account about one of us. The drawing out of the story became an intimate experience, as the familiar was made strange and recast in new ways. It was pleasurable but risky for both of us, like an exchange of gifts between new friends. And from the exchange emerged the biography, a co-creation.

Then too, ours is a story of increasingly blurred distinctions. Each of us faced various technical and ethical questions. As our partnership grew, we found that the technical and the ethical could not be separated in practice. We became very aware that we had put outselves, and not just a research project, on the line. We negotiated our ways through a complex world of approaches and retreats, of trust and doubt, of tactic and reaction--all to a counterpoint theme of power and reciprocity. As we moved toward greater collaboration, we could no longer hide behind the masks of our respective "official" roles. We were no longer The Interviewer and The Interviewee, but Beth and Claudette, explorers together within the world of our joint project.

Finally, ours is a story about discovering and illustrating some of the demands of life-story interview research. We are two people with much in common,

including our gender, our profession, and aspects of our socio-historical context. Yet, our partnership was fragile. In retrospect, it is obvious that there were times during the pilot study when each of us understood our interactions in a different way. For people who have less in common to begin with, the possibilities for misunderstanding would be multiplied. Somehow, each of us did find the self-confidence to take risks, to live with ambiguity, and to learn about ourselves as we learned about the other. To some extent, we gave one another the necessary support and confidence to carry on. If either of us had faltered, the project would have failed. If, at the start, either of us had understood what we were undertaking, would we even have begun?

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